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14. ABSTRACT The conflict in Afghanistan is currently in its eighth year and the United States Government and its NATO/ISAF partners are in the process of rethinking their entire strategy. Eight years of counterinsurgency, counterterrorist, and stabilization operations have thus far resulted in an ever steady increase in the level of violence, an unprecedented resurgence of Taliban control and Al Qaeda operations across the entire country, and has arguably brought the entire US and NATO/ISAF effort to the precipice of mission failure. At the forefront of efforts in Afghanistan are US/OEF and NATO/ISAF Special Operation Forces (SOF). The organizational command and control structure for SOF in Afghanistan is a major shortcoming in SOF effectiveness, and does not follow the Principal of War Unity of Command, and only vaguely supports the idea of Unity of Effort. In spite of the similarity of mission, operational focus and capabilities, within the confines of the theater command and control architecture, US/OEF and NATO/ISAF SOF and their mandates are separate and distinct and essentially operate independently of one another. Arguably the most flexible, dynamic and productive force in Afghanistan, changes to the SOF organizational command and control structure could yield significant impact and results.					
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**NAVAL WAR COLLEGE
Newport, R.I.**

**Command and Control of Special Operations Forces in Afghanistan: Is Unity of Effort
Good Enough?**

by

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**A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the
requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.**

**The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily
endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.**

Signature: _____

23 October 2009

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Abstract

The conflict in Afghanistan is currently in its eighth year and the United States Government and its NATO/ISAF partners are in the process of rethinking their entire strategy. Eight years of counterinsurgency, counterterrorist, and stabilization operations have thus far resulted in an ever steady increase in the level of violence, an unprecedented resurgence of Taliban control and Al Qaeda operations across the entire country, and has arguably brought the entire US and NATO/ISAF effort to the precipice of mission failure.

At the forefront of efforts in Afghanistan are US/OEF and NATO/ISAF Special Operation Forces (SOF). The organizational command and control structure for SOF in Afghanistan is a major shortcoming in SOF effectiveness, and does not follow the Principal of War Unity of Command, and only vaguely supports the idea of Unity of Effort. In spite of the similarity of mission, operational focus and capabilities, within the confines of the theater command and control architecture, US/OEF and NATO/ISAF SOF and their mandates are separate and distinct and essentially operate independently of one another. Arguably the most flexible, dynamic and productive force in Afghanistan, changes to the SOF organizational command and control structure could yield significant results.

"The question is not whether we're making progress. The question is whether we're making enough progress fast enough"

GEN Stanley McChrystal, Commander, U.S. Forces Afghanistan / International Security Assistance Force, Afghanistan

INTRODUCTION

The conflict in Afghanistan is currently in its eighth year and the US government and its NATO/International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) partners are in the process of rethinking their entire strategy. Eight years of counterinsurgency, counterterrorist, and stabilization operations have thus far resulted in an ever steady increase in the level of violence, an unprecedented resurgence of Taliban control and Al Qaeda operations across the entire country, and arguably brought the entire US/NATO ISAF effort to the precipice of mission failure. General Stanley McChrystal states that after eight years of operations in Afghanistan, there has to be a "dramatic change in how we operate".¹

At the forefront of the efforts in Afghanistan are US/Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and NATO/ISAF Special Operation Forces (SOF). Arguably the most flexible, dynamic and productive force in Afghanistan, changes to the SOF organizational command and control structure could yield significant positive results. In spite of the similarity of mission, operational focus and capabilities, within the confines of the theater command and control architecture, these organizations and their mandates are separate and distinct and essentially operate independently of one another. The organizational command and control structure for SOF in Afghanistan is a major shortcoming in SOF effectiveness, and does not follow the Principal of War Unity of Command, and only vaguely supports the idea of Unity of Effort. The current mandate put forth by the existing SOF organizational command and

¹ General Stanley McChrystal, interview by David Martin, *60 Minutes*, CBS News on line September 24, 2009. <http://www.cbsnews.com/video/watch/?id=5336125n&tag=contentMain;contentBody>

control structure intimates that unity of effort is good enough for this war, is clearly wrong and requires immediate re-thinking if US and coalition forces are to avoid failure.

During this eight year period of war there have been many Afghan and coalition successes, but the cumulative results to date are not encouraging. The Afghan government is a partner with a very questionable legitimate claim to govern, an improving but still largely ineffective Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan National Police (ANP); and a cumbersome and restrictive US and NATO/ISAF SOF command structure. The manner in which SOF operations are being conducted in Afghanistan is simply not working, with the end result being a demonstrated lack of resolve and support amongst some of our coalition partners, and the erosion of popular support of the American people. The success of SOF is a microcosm of the allied war effort to date, and without significant change, there is a very real risk of operational failure.

This paper will explore and analyze the coalition SOF organizational command and control structure in Afghanistan focusing on the US/OEF and NATO/ISAF SOF that are assigned to the two SOF communities in country: the Combined Forces Special Operations Component Command- Afghanistan (CFSOCC-A), and the NATO/ISAF SOF. It will not consider any Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) units that may operate in Afghanistan.

BACKGROUND

“If you handed the Taliban a sheet of paper and said draw a wire diagram and organizational structure that could really, really make General McKiernan’s job a hard and difficult one, they would have essentially written this organizational diagram we are operating on now.”²

COL(Retired) David Lamm, former Chief of Staff, CFC-A

² Public Broadcast System on line. The On-Line News Hour. “Afghanistan and the War on Terror” http://www.pbs.org/newshour/indepth_coverage/asia/afghanistan/jan-june09/afghanpod_04-01.html

Command and Control in Theory. There are many military theorists and senior military officials who believe that one cannot expect to achieve unity of command when conducting coalition operations. The practical nature of this belief is expressed by Dr. Milan Vego when he states that, “In coalition operation warfare, unity of effort is normally accomplished through cooperation. In most cases, political sensibilities, differences in military culture, psychological considerations, and even the personalities of the coalition commanders do not allow the establishment of an organization based on unity of command.”³ Joint Publication 3-0, *Joint Operations*, states that unity of command means that all forces operate under a single commander with the requisite authority to direct all forces employed in pursuit of a common purpose.⁴ Unity of effort is defined as coordination and cooperation toward common objectives, even if the participants are not necessarily part of the same command or organization—the product of successful unified action.⁵ Dr. Vego puts forth that the best way to ensure unity of effort is to achieve it through unity of command. Our practical experience in Afghanistan supports Vego in that without ensuring unity of effort by the construct of an SOF organizational command and control structure that has unity of command, coalition partners have been working to achieve the same stated objectives, yet they have not successfully achieved unity of effort.⁶

Command and Control in Practice. Two separate and distinct structures are apparent when one examines the organizational command and control structure for SOF in Afghanistan. To fully understand the issues with command and control of SOF in Afghanistan, we must first

³ Milan Vego, *Joint Operational Warfare: Theory and Practice. Volume I*, VIII-8.

⁴ Joint Publication (JP) 3-0, *Joint Operations*, Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2008, A-2.

⁵ Vego, *Joint Operational Warfare*, VIII-8.

⁶ The author is a Special Forces Colonel with three tours in Afghanistan working at the Special Operations tactical, operational and strategic levels between 2004 and 2009. The context of the comments and opinions expressed are based on the author’s personal observations working directly with or as part of US/OEF and NATO/ISAF SOF elements in Afghanistan.

understand the mandates under which these separate SOF organizations operate. SOF in Afghanistan are primarily organized and operate under either a US/Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) mandate, or a NATO/ISAF mandate. The US lead OEF mandate is essentially focused on conducting Foreign Internal Defense (FID) by training, advising and assisting Afghan SOF elements, and conducting counterterrorist and counterinsurgency operations. The NATO/ISAF mandate is focused on conducting stabilization operations and some low level counter insurgency operations.⁷ The US/OEF SOF mandate is more robust and much less restrictive than the NATO/ISAF SOF mandate, enhancing US/OEF SOF freedom of maneuver and freedom of action as compared to their NATO/ISAF counterparts. This gives US/OEF SOF significant operational flexibility, allowing US/OEF SOF elements to operate throughout the Combined Joint Operations Area-Afghanistan (CJOA-Afghanistan); and not limiting their operations to a specific Regional Command (RC) boundary. Conversely, the NATO/ISAF SOF mandate is more restrictive in nature and includes multiple national caveats that further limit both their freedom of maneuver and freedom of action.⁸ The various NATO/ISAF SOF elements are restricted to conducting operations only within nationally dictated areas of operation (within their respective RC) and only within their specific national caveats. For example, Italian SOF elements operating under the NATO/ISAF mandate may only operate within RC West, in which Italy is the lead nation, and where the Italian SOF may only conduct specific operations under carefully specified conditions and circumstances.⁹ Additionally, although RC West is commanded by an Italian General Officer, there is no direct command relationship between the Italian RC

⁷ Congressional Research Service Report for Congress, *NATO in Afghanistan: A Test of the Transatlantic Alliance*, Washington, D.C.: CRS July 2, 2009. 17.

⁸ Congressional Research Service Report for Congress, *NATO in Afghanistan*, 10.

⁹ Personal email from GEN(R) McKiernan to the author.

commander and the Italian SOF element, further complicating coordination and command relationships.

Structure. Currently, the US/OEF SOF component headquarters, Combined Forces Special Operations Component Command-Afghanistan (CFSOCC-A), falls under the operational control (OPCON) of the Commander, United States Special Operations Command Central Command (SOCCENT), and under the tactical control (TACON) of the Commander, United States Forces – Afghanistan (CDRUSFOR-A). The US/OEF SOF component forces of CFSOCC-A consist of US and non-NATO/ISAF coalition partner SOF organized under the Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force-Afghanistan (CJSOTF-A). CJSOTF-A is under the operational command of the CFSOCC-A. The non-NATO/ISAF coalition partner SOF elements fall under the TACON of the CJSOTF-A but are under the OPCON of their National Command Element (NCE) (see figure 1).

US/OEF SOF COMMAND AND CONTROL

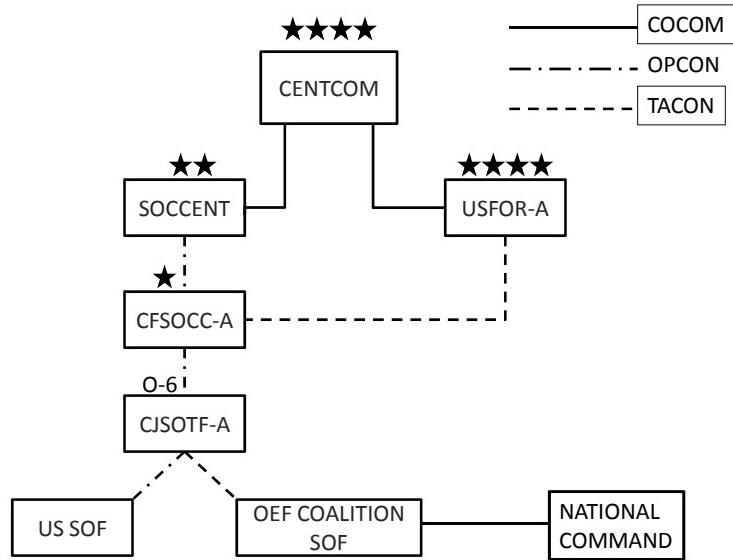


Figure 1, US/OEF SOF Command and Control Structure¹⁰

The NATO/ISAF SOF elements operate under the NATO operational command (NATO OPCOM) of their respective NCE and are under the NATO operational control (NATO OPCON) of the COMISAF. COMISAF has delegated the NATO OPCON of NATO/ISAF SOF to COM ISAF SOF. COM ISAF SOF exercises NATO OPCON of NATO SOF through the NATO/ISAF Special Operations Command and Control Element (SOCCE) (see figure 2). COM ISAF SOF exercises NATO OPCON of the NATO ISAF SOF elements that operate in the various RCs. There is no command relationship between the RC Commander and the NATO ISAF SOF elements that are operating within the RC.

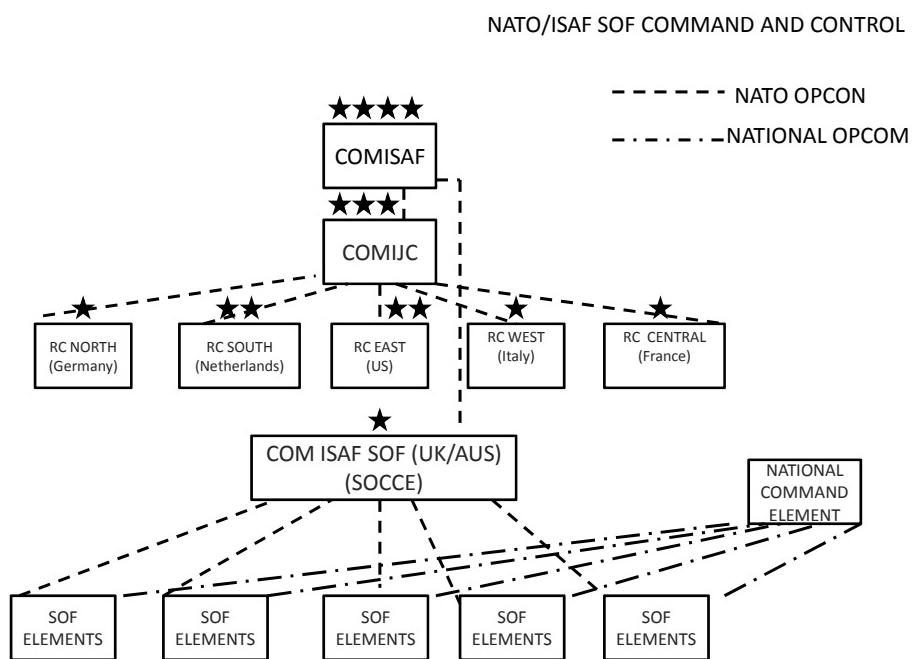


Figure 2, NATO/ISAF SOF Command and Control Structure¹¹

¹⁰ Sean Naylor, “New Special Forces HQ coming to Afghanistan. Buildup of forces means need for closer oversight, official says,” The Military Times, January 31, 2009, and authors personal knowledge.

¹¹ NATO/ISAF homepage, NATO CJFSOCC Handbook-4th Study Draft, 2009, p. 2-1 - p 2-3 and the authors personal knowledge.

ANALYSIS

“ISAF’s subordinate headquarters must stop fighting separate campaigns. Under the existing structure, some components are not effectively organized and multiple headquarters fail to achieve either unity of command or unity of effort.”¹²

COMISAF’s assessment findings and conclusions Sept 21, 2009

Military and political realities. GEN(R) David McKiernan, former CDRUSFOR-A / COMISAF, states that the SOF command and control structure that has developed in Afghanistan is a reflection of, “what the market will bear.”⁷ By this, he is referring to the coalition political realities that in many ways hamstring military operations in Afghanistan. It is a convoluted situation. Many of the countries participating in military operations in Afghanistan refuse to do so under the US/OEF mandate, and they will only participate under the NATO/ISAF auspices. They will also allow the commitment of their military forces only under strict national caveats (which compound the negative effects of the even less robust NATO/ISAF mandate). These restrictions and limitations have essentially forced the development of two separate and distinct chains of command for SOF in Afghanistan. The reasons for this reluctance to participate in military operations in Afghanistan under the US/OEF mandate are varied, but in general they can be traced to a reluctance to be associated with the unpopular Bush Administration, a fear of having their forces committed to OEF objectives which they don’t support, and a fear that the United States would redirect additional forces outside of Afghanistan, leaving NATO/ISAF participants to stabilize Afghanistan by themselves.¹³

Why unity of command? One of the principle purposes behind unity of command is to construct a command and control framework that best allows the commander in this case, the

¹² Washington Post on line. “Report of COMISAF’s Initial Assessment Findings and Conclusions.” <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/09/21/AR2009092100110.html>.

¹³ Congressional Research Service Report for Congress, *NATO in Afghanistan*, 21.

dual-hatted four star General, CDRUSFOR-A/COMISAF the most effective means to achieve his objectives. This begs the question: does the current SOF organizational command and control structure in Afghanistan optimize its contribution? When the commander's objectives are best achieved by the application of SOF effects, in Afghanistan, he has to evaluate which SOF elements working under which mandate are the right choice. Often times, to achieve the effects desired, the commander must work through both US/OEF and NATO/ISAF frameworks, a cumbersome and ineffective process. The result is that the commander must work through two separate, typically unsynchronized chains of command to achieve his desired effects. To further complicate matters, the timing and synchronization of these desired effects may be essential to the success of other, simultaneous operations as part of a larger effort. This is an extremely inefficient process that exponentially increases the effort required to unify SOF and conventional efforts, and to achieve the commander's intent. This structure simply does not provide a framework for efficient, effective and timely SOF operations. What is apparent is that there is no single SOF component commander and staff, that the CDRUSFOR-A/COMISAF can turn to with the ability to breach the bottlenecks and administrative hurdles between the US and NATO/ISAF SOF command and control structures in order to achieve efficiency in SOF operations in Afghanistan.

Evaluation Criteria: To fully analyze this problem, both US/OEF SOF and NATO/ISAF SOF command and control organizational structures must be evaluated individually and collectively against some general criteria. There are several standards that could be used to evaluate this issue, but the quintessential "must do" for any SOF command and control structure is a streamlined and responsive chain of command that eliminates unnecessary bureaucracy and duplication of effort. For efficiency, subordinate elements must answer to

one commander: they should not be forced to serve two masters. In order to achieve maximum unity of effort and effects the structure must be able to reach across the operational environment to all battle space owners to coordinate (which should include the sharing of intelligence), synchronize effects, deconflict, support and command and control SOF operations. The criteria that best reflect these principles are flexibility, simplicity, unity of effort and unity of command.

Flexibility. Flexibility is the organizational C2 structure's ability to support and develop CDRUSFOR-A/COMISAF's guidance and intent. It must have the structural ability to adapt quickly to a change of mission and the requirement to move resources and assets around the Combined Joint Operational Area (CJOA) based on the situation on the battlefield. The measure of flexibility is a direct reflection of the staff structure, function and capability.

Simplicity. Simplicity is a clear, uncomplicated and easily understood organizational structure. Additionally, the procedures and decision making authority within this structure must be clearly delineated and identified without redundancy or overlapping responsibilities.

Unity of Effort. This evaluation criterion refers to the C2 organizational structure's ability to coordinate, synchronize, and support effects across the battlespace both with other SOF units and the actual battlespace owner. When applying this criterion, one must evaluate the amount and type of staff organizations that are the primary mechanism for making this coordination and synchronization happen.

Unity of Command. For the purposes of this analysis, this evaluation criterion refers to the degree in which the organizational C2 structure has a single commander with the requisite authority to direct, control and employ all forces within his span of control.

US/OEF SOF Command and Control Organizational Structure.

Flexibility. In order to support and develop CDRUSFOR-A's guidance and intent, the organizational C2 structure must provide the optimal means to receive that guidance and intent from the commander. The current command relationship of the existing structure supports this with a TACON relationship between CDRUSFOR-A and CFSOCC-A. Once CDRUSFOR-A gives guidance or directives to CFSOCC-A, its Joint Staff organization provides the flexibility for interacting with theater and national level assets (both SOF and conventional) that can plan, collect and share intelligence and coordinate and synchronize efforts and effects at the operational level across the CJOA-A. The CFSOCC-A staff then passes the information and mission down to the CJSOTF-A, while continuing to plan and support at the operational level. The CJSOTF-A staff, a Joint and Combined staff, continues the planning at the lower operational and upper tactical level, and is also plugged into theater level assets. They continue to plan, support and pass the mission requirements down to the Special Operations Task Force for tactical planning and execution. The cumulative effect of having multiple layers of SOF Joint staffs is extremely beneficial: at the operational and tactical levels the mutual support provides maximum agility to respond to the changing battlefield situations. Because these elements operate under the OEF mandate, this organizational structure provides CDRUSFOR-A the flexibility to operate and achieve objectives anywhere in CJOA-A.

Simplicity. In contrast to the NATO/ISAF structure, the US/OEF SOF command and control organizational structure is clear, straightforward and uncomplicated. The levels of command authority are clear, and the command relationship between USFOR-A, CFSOCC-A and the CJSOTF-A flow in a direct line. The commanders at each level have complete operational

control of their subordinate elements. There is a slight divergence of this construct at the lowest level within the CJSOTF-A: the CJSOTF-A commander has TACON (vice OPCON) of the non-ISAF coalition SOF elements assigned to the CJSOTF-A. These coalition SOF partners remain under the operational command of their respective NCE.

Unity of Effort. The US/OEF SOF C2 organizational structure provides the ability to coordinate, synchronize and support operations at the theater/operational and tactical levels. Both the CFSOCC-A and the CJSTOF-A have plug-ins at the USFOR-A, ISAF, and RC-East (US Commanded area) staffs, which facilitate capability. They do not however, have this direct relationship at the other four RC Headquarters. In the current organizational command and control structure, similar effects must be achieved through indirect coordination through the ISAF RC liaison officers (LNOs). Unity of effort is actually easier to achieve with the Afghan SOF units because the CJSOTF-A enjoys a long established partnered relationship with them. CJSOTF-A elements are partnered with Afghan National Army SOF elements as part of their train-advise-assist Foreign Internal Development (FID) mission.

Unity of Command. Unity of command is achieved within the US/OEF SOF organizational command and control structure. At the highest levels in the theater SOF structure, CDRCFSOCC-A is the single SOF component commander, minus any JSOC SOF that may be operating in country. CDRCFSOCC-A is under the TACON of the CDRUSFOR-A and answers to no other commander within CJOA-A. The CJSOTF-A commander answers directly to the CDRCFSOCC-A and no one else in the CJOA-A. Minor limitations arise with the CJSOTF-A coalition partners caused by the operational command of these elements residing with their various NCEs.

NATO/ISAF SOF Command and Control Organizational Structure.

Flexibility. The NATO/ISAF SOF C2 organizational structure provides a direct plug-in to the COMISAF (see figure 2), ensuring that both guidance and intent are received directly from the commander. This structure also provides increased flexibilities to COMISAF because he maintains a NATO OPCON relationship to the COM ISAF SOF who commands the ISAF Special Operations Command and Control Element (SOCCE). The flexibility of the NATO/ISAF SOF structure becomes severely restricted from this point on. The NATO/ISAF SOCCE, which operates at the operational level, is the only Joint operational or tactical staff element established between the COMISAF and the NATO/ISAF Special Operations Task Groups (SOTG), the tactical elements that actually execute missions. This one dimensional, single level C2 structure unnecessarily limits the amount of flexibility within the organizational structure. It reduces NATO/ISAF SOF agility, and limits the organization's ability to react to multiple situations and operations at the same time, significantly reducing its ability to support the objectives of the COMISAF. Since the various NATO/ISAF SOF elements are restricted to operating only within their nationally dictated areas of operation, RC North, South, East, West or Central, the ability to achieve effects that defeat, degrade or neutralize insurgent/terrorist networks is frequently restricted by a self-imposed boundary. Achieving these types of effects requires staff planning, coordination and synchronization of information, intelligence and operations to take place at the national level, as well as the operational and tactical levels, in order to achieve the greatest chance of success. The current command and control organizational structure established in support of NATO/ISAF SOF fails to achieve this goal. Not only is the planning for these operations

limited by the lack of operational and tactical staff capability, the complications of executing these operations are amplified tremendously by national caveats and the generally restrictive nature of the NATO/ISAF mandate in general. This limited ability of the NATO/ISAF SOF elements to move freely throughout the CJOA-A (as they are restricted to their respective RCs) reduces their effectiveness against insurgent/terrorist organizations whose areas of operations do not follow the operational boundaries of the various RCs. This creates seams that the insurgents/terrorists can freely exploit.

Simplicity. The organizational command and control structure of the NATO/ISAF SOF is superficially simple and straightforward in design. The seemingly simplistic nature of the physical design is defeated by the NATO/ISAF mandate and the national caveats of the individual member nations. The ability to make relatively simple operational or tactical decisions is complicated and delayed when NATO/ISAF SOF decisions have to be referred to their respective NSE for approval.

Unity of Effort. Staff expertise is a key element in operational success. Without an adequate operational level staff capability (found only at the operational level within the NATO ISAF organizational command and control structure) it becomes almost impossible to coordinate, synchronize and deconflict operations across Afghanistan. This shortfall is further exacerbated by the security and classification differences between NATO and OEF forces, which results in NATO/ISAF SOF having a limited number of LNOs placed with OEF units. LNOs are a second critical element for success, and the extent to which unity of effort is achieved between the OEF and NATO/ISAF SOF is largely due to the presence of LNOs from the CFSOCC-A into the SOCCE. While this facilitates some measure of unity of effort between the organizations, it does not overcome the requirement that information must flow

through individuals (a potential choke point) versus multiple staffs integrated at both tactical and operational levels.

Unity of Command. The NATO/ISAF SOF organizational command and control structure appears to facilitate unity of command. COMISAF exercises NATO OPCON of NATO/ISAF SOF through COM ISAF SOF and the SOCCE. The SOCCE then executes NATO OPCON of the various SOTGs. There are several detractors that prevent the achievement of unity of command within the NATO/ISAF SOF C2 structure. One such detractor is due to the SOCCE commander not possessing the authority to fully direct, control or employ the forces within his command structure (as might be required), even though he technically has NATO OPCON authority. The various national caveats placed on the NATO/ISAF SOF elements under his command and the requirement to frequently refer operational decisions “upstairs” to the NCE level (vice being decided at the SOCCE), erode his authority. Having to contend with all of these requirements results in the introduction of an artificial second chain of command; this results in significantly complicating all attempts at unity of command.

CJOA-A Combined SOF Command and Control Organizational Structure.

Flexibility. The flexibility provided by the combined SOF organizational command and control structure is both robust and limited. The flexibility that is achieved within the structure comes from having two separate structures and two sets of mandates. While it is true that the CDRUSFOR-A/COMISAF does have the “flexibility” to cherry-pick between SOF structures and mandates to accomplish his desired effects, being forced to use both channels instead of using a single combined SOF component commander, overcomes any superficial advantage. Because there is no single Combined SOF component commander,

CDRUSFOR-A/COMISAF must give his intent and guidance to two separate SOF component commanders.

Simplicity. When viewed as a combined system, the command and control organization does not achieve simplicity. The structure is not clear, straightforward or uncomplicated, and it is difficult to understand. Because of the proliferation of competing structures, mandates and national caveats, the decision making authority is not easily identified. This situation is further exacerbated by the frequent requirement to forward operational matters out of the country (and chain of command) for decision. In addition to questions of clarity, the organizational structure has significant overlap and redundancy built in because of the requirement to maintain two separate systems and structures (one under each mandate).

Unity of Effort. The command and control organizational structure must coordinate, synchronize and support operations both within its own structure and external to that organization. The degree to which unity of effort is achieved between the OEF and NATO/ISAF SOF command and control structures has already been explored, with deficiencies identified. A combined organization must have the ability to achieve intelligence fusion internally (and to a degree intelligence sharing externally), share national level assets, and coordinate these and other synchronization activities at the operational and tactical level across the battlespace. As it currently exists, the combined SOF organizational command and control structural fails to achieve this. In Afghanistan, there have been limited SOF intelligence fusion cells or coordination elements (such as Special Operations Liaison Element (SOLE)), or Special Operations Coordination Element (SOCOORD), located in each of the RCs. Without these coordination elements located at the RC level, it is almost impossible to routinely achieve unity of effort for SOF operations with the battlespace owner.

Unity of Command. The combined SOF command and control organizational structure does not achieve unity of command. As a combined organizational structural, there is no single Combined SOF component commander who has the requisite authority to direct, control and employ all forces within the organization.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

“We will continue to work with our coalition partners and allies to achieve progress, in part by refining our command and control structures to coordinate more effectively the actions of US forces working for NATO ISAF and with Afghan forces.”

GEN David Patraeus’ testimony to the Senate Armed Services Committee, 1 April, 2009

The current command and control organizational structure for SOF in Afghanistan has gradually evolved over the past eight years, and is a product of the political and military realities of conducting coalition warfare. If the level of success in Afghanistan to date is the measure, this SOF organizational structure is clearly inadequate and is failing. If we hope to ever achieve our objectives in Afghanistan and to produce the levels of success that inspire coalition members and our populations to have resolve, this organizational structure must be changed. We cannot continue to operate in the status quo and cannot justify the cost in treasure and lives it will take to achieve our objectives without seeking to change that which is clearly not working.

In order to achieve unity of command and unity of effort, a combined SOF component command headquarters must be established in Afghanistan. Once established, this single combined SOF component command would work best under only one mandate. Since it is not realistic to expect all participating coalition partners to commit their SOF under the OEF mandate (see figure 3), serious consideration should be given to committing US SOF forces to Afghanistan under the NATO/ISAF mandate which could mirror what is successfully being done with US forces in RC East. In order to keep this from diminishing

US SOF freedom of maneuver, much effort would be required by senior US military and government officials to work with NATO senior leadership in order to expand the flexibility of the NATO/ISAF mandate.

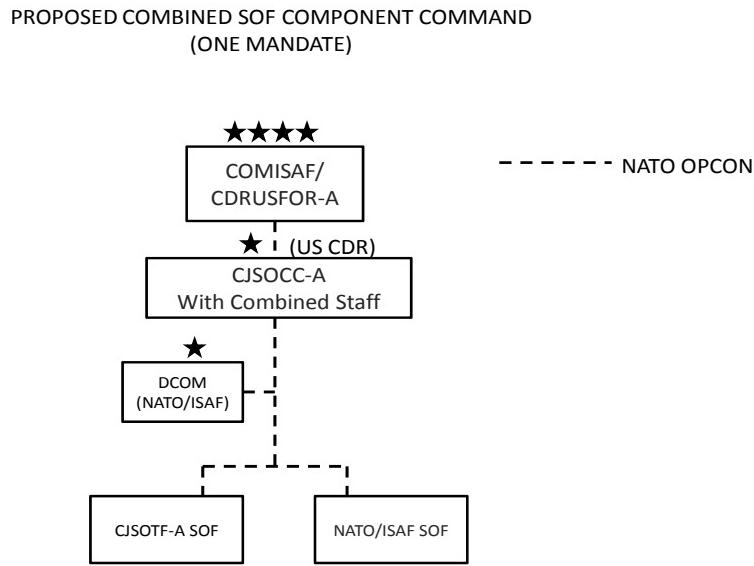


Figure 3, Proposed Combined SOF Component Command under one mandate

Should political realities preclude SOF from achieving unity of command, unity of effort could be achieved for US/OEF and NATO/ISAF SOF under both mandates. Operating under two separate mandates is extremely complex, but true unity of effort is achievable via the establishment of a combined SOF component command headquarters. The foundation for such a structural organization currently exists within Afghanistan and within Joint and NATO doctrine. The CFSOCC-A can serve as the framework and foundation for such a structure. By combining the NATO/ISAF SOCCE and the CFSOCC-A into one Combined SOF component command (with an integrated staff), a single SOF component commander and staff finally would be established. This headquarters could be designated the Combined Joint Special Operations Component Command-Afghanistan or CJSOCC-A; or if using

NATO doctrine, it would be designated Combined Joint Forces Special Operations Component Command (CJFSOCC).¹⁴ This organization could be established such that required mandates would be retained while the overall organization would be under the OPCON of COMISAF (see figure 4).

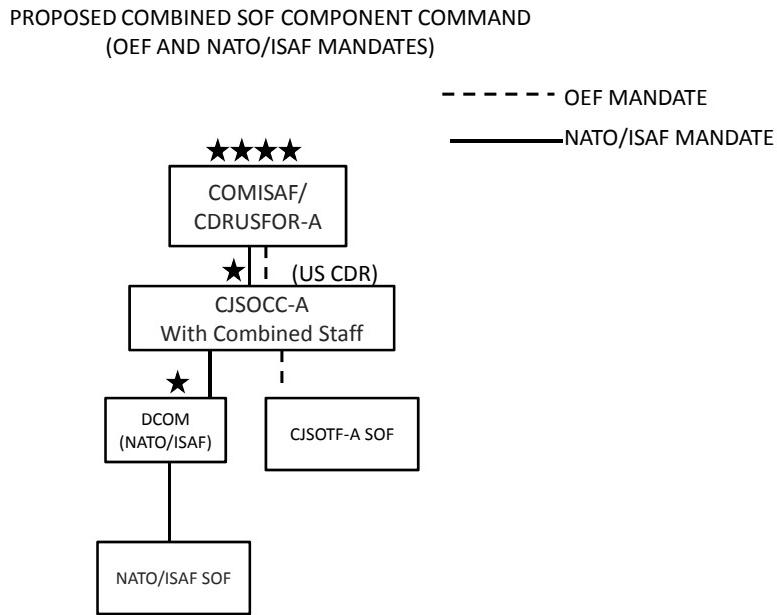


Figure 4, Proposed Combined SOF Component Command under OEF and NATO ISAF Mandate

Intelligence sharing. It is imperative for any organization conducting counterinsurgency operations to have a robust intelligence fusion/sharing capability. This is difficult, but we simply must unravel this puzzle, and develop a mechanism that will provide for the sharing of intelligence between US and NATO/ISAF SOF elements.

Other initiatives. There are several other initiatives that can be undertaken to improve the unity of effort of SOF in Afghanistan. The first initiative must begin to solve the national caveat issue. COMISAF must push this issue through the NATO chain of command to get participating nations to remove or significantly reduce the restrictive national caveats they

¹⁴ NATO CJFSOCC Handbook, Chapter 1.

place on their SOF. The current organizational command and control structure is a blueprint for failure, and the inability to operate and take the fight to insurgents/terrorists cells within the CJOA-A, is unreasonably restrictive and counterproductive. Withholding decision making authority at the NCE level is also counterproductive. Decision making authority must reside either within the NATO/ISAF SOCCE or at the senior country representative level within Afghanistan (i.e., RC Commander).

One of the most effective ways to address and improve unity of effort between SOF and conventional forces is to establish SOF coordination elements at all of the RC Headquarters (see figure 5). The placement of SOLEs or SOCEs at each of the RCs would ensure the deconfliction, coordination and synchronization of SOF operations and effects across the CJOA-A. These coordination elements should be composed of combined US/NATO ISAF SOF personnel to ensure the visibility of all SOF operations. Without these SOF liaison and coordination elements embedded in each of the RC Commander's staff, we will never achieve synchronization or unity of effort and will continue to seemingly fight unsuccessful campaigns in the same battlespace. This will end in failure.

Proposed Structure for Combined Special Operations Coordination Elements
at Each Regional Command Under a Proposed Combined SOF Component Command

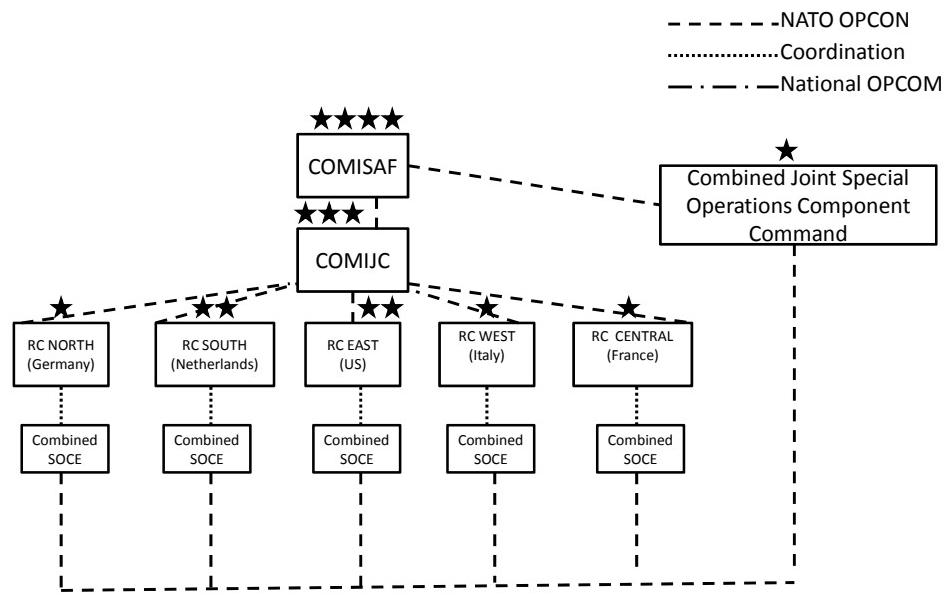


Figure 5, Proposed Structure for use of Combined SOCE at each RC

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